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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 005423

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [EUN](#) [GG](#) [NATO](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: EUR DAS BRYZA'S PARIS CONSULTATIONS ON GEORGIA

REF: TBILISI 1876

Classified By: PolMC Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Visiting DAS Matt Bryza met August 2 with French Deputy PolDir Baleine du Laurens to discuss developments in Georgia and Abkhazia. On Georgian reforms, Bryza countered a suggestion by Laurens that Georgia was regressing by pointing to continued improvements in press freedom, treatment of prisoners, judicial independence, and reducing corruption. But Bryza conceded there was still room for improvement in the GOG's inter-agency coordination and implementation of reforms. Bryza affirmed the importance of a September decision on NATO intensified dialogue for Georgia, while the French complained that the Georgians were unnecessarily provocative vis-a-vis Russia. On Abkhazia, Laurens and Bryza agreed on the need for a UN police force in Gali. Bryza speculated that the recent Kodori operation had potentially changed the strategic terms of Georgian-Abkhaz relations and created a greater justification for the Abkhaz to allow for an expanded UN presence on their doorstep. Bryza and Laurens agreed that the Abkhaz needed to be shown they had options other than Russia's embrace, including possible trade ties with Turkey. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) EUR DAS Matt Bryza discussed Georgia and Abkhazia August 2 with MFA Deputy PolDir Frederic Baleine du Laurens. Laurens was accompanied by Deputy Director for Continental Europe Serge Smessow and Office Director for Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia Aurelia Bouchez. EUR CARC Conflicts Advisor and Deputy PolCouns accompanied Bryza.

Georgia

¶3. (C) Bryza briefed Laurens on the recent Georgian police operation in the Kodori valley. He stressed that the U.S. had warned the Georgians to avoid being drawn into any military confrontation in the Kodori Valley or elsewhere in the region. He told Laurens that Georgian efforts to assert its authority over the Kodori Valley needed to focus on establishing civil authority through rebuilding infrastructure and providing services to local residents -- not by any further military or police actions in the region. While he was confident that President Saakashvili understood the U.S. position, he was less confident about MOD Okruashvili's hawkish tendencies.

¶4. (C) Laurens expressed concern that Georgia was regressing on the issues of the rule of law, corruption, and democratic institutions. Seeing the glass as half full, Bryza argued that Georgia continued to move forward, even if the pace of reforms was slower than before. He cited advances in press freedom, decreases of police abuse of prisoners in custody, a lowering of corruption, and increasing judicial independence. Bouchez speculated that Saakashvili's commitment to reform did not lead to concomitant implementation by Georgia's ministries. Bryza acknowledged that the government had difficulty converting its intentions into deeds, and called

for a change in political culture that would also empower the political opposition. Noting the upcoming municipal elections, he commented that Saakashvili's enormous popularity could produce election results that, ironically, might lead observers to question the fairness of the elections. Bouchez noted that the electoral rules were rigged to produce an outcome that was not necessarily representative. Bryza agreed that this was a potential problem and undertook to raise it with Georgian authorities.

15. (C) Bryza, citing U.S. support of NATO intensified dialogue (ID) with Georgia, noted the importance Saakashvili attached to the international community's role in supporting his country. Even allowing for Georgian paranoia, Bryza said Saakashvili had been feeling abandoned and that ID was therefore an important acknowledgment of Georgia's European vocation. Bouchez complained that Georgia often acted against its own interests, particularly vis-a-vis Russia, undervaluing European efforts to assist it and tending to view a "balanced" approach to Georgia and Russia as betrayal of Georgia. Bryza urged Bouchez to show more understanding for Georgia's concerns about facing Russia alone. That said, he assured Bouchez that any U.S. decisions on NATO membership (or MAP) for Georgia would be based on performance; he expressed hope that France would judge Georgia's candidacy on its own merits, as well, and not through the optic of relations with Russia.

Abkhazia

16. (C) Laurens said the moment had arrived to begin considering the deployment of a UN international police force to Gali to foster the return of IDPs, although he was not sure that the UN was fully on board. (Bryza noted that the

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Georgians had told him that a UN fact-finding mission for a potential international police force in Abkhazia would commence later this month.) Laurens thought the UN could also do more in the areas of health and education. Without immediate attention, he feared Abkhazia would disappear from the international agenda, and Georgia would be tempted to consider a non-peaceful resolution of the conflict. Bryza agreed on the desirability of demonstrating to Georgia that solutions other than military ones were possible and speculated that the Abkhaz might well have an interest in winning some "breathing space" from Russian pressure. He said he had asked Abkhaz de facto FM Shamba if the presence of UN police could help Abkhazia deal with (Russian) CIS forces, to which Shamba had responded affirmatively. Others in the Abkhaz leadership had rejected this idea, however, because any significant return of refugees would lead to an eventual referendum result against independence.

17. (C) Bryza said the recent Georgian police action in Kodori had shifted the strategic terms of the conflict. He added that the U.S. saw the Georgian action as justified, as it allowed Georgia to reassert its authority over a region dominated by criminal elements for many years and created the opportunity to resume UNOMIG observation activities in the region. He speculated that it could help bolster Georgian authority in dealing with the Abkhaz, and help convince them that a UN police force was needed in addition to CIS peacekeepers.

18. (C) Laurens asked whether Georgia would agree to enhanced Turkish-Abkhaz trade ties. Bryza responded that Saakashvili could accept a joint Georgian-Turkish-Abkhaz customs presence in Batumi, on Georgian territory, but opposed it in Turkey, since that could be construed as international recognition for Abkhazia. Laurens responded the Abkhaz could not accept a Georgian presence in Batumi, but affirmed it was important that the Abkhaz have ties to others besides Russia, as a means of demonstrating to the Abkhaz that they had other choices.

19. (U) DAS Bryza cleared this message.

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